

SELECT BOARD

Fiscal Year 2007

Like every year, FY 07 has been a very busy one for the Amherst Select Board. FY 07 marked the first year of Larry Shaffer's tenure as the new Town Manager. Larry hit the ground running as the Select Board directed him to accomplish several tasks important to this board. Among these charges were: 1) work with the Amherst Police Department and UMass to create a new Mutual Aid Agreement; 2) address the process for new businesses obtaining permits and begin to make it more business-friendly; 3) address the woeful condition of minority hiring in Town Hall; 4) take an active role in overseeing the construction of the Plum Brook athletic fields; 5) work vigorously with the University and colleges to not only work together in spirit, but to have a new financial relationship; 6) explore economic development with the University; 7) explore problems at Cherry Hill Golf Course and take action to improve service and finances at the site; 8) be mindful of Town-wide transportation issues – parking, congestion, bike lanes, bus service; 9) develop a budget based on existing revenues; 10) address areas of Town government that could be changed to save money; 11) work more closely with the community to address grievances.

Mr. Shaffer followed these instructions and, as a result, we now have a signed Mutual Aid Agreement that gives UMass police officers more latitude in enforcing Town and State laws on Town property; an improved relationship between our business owners and Town Hall; an increase in the hiring of persons of color; improved compliance with DEA regulations at the Plum Brook recreation site; a new strategic partnership with UMass being negotiated that will increase Fire/EMS payments to the Town; a working task force exploring joint economic development between the Town of Amherst and the Town of Hadley and UMass; new management of Cherry Hill, resulting in improved service and finances; reorganization of veteran's services to lower costs; a budget that did not use reserve funds for the first time in seven years; a new parking task force; improved relations with members of the community and a more pro-active approach to solving neighborhood problems.

There was one change in membership on the Board. In March, Alisa Brewer was elected to replace Robie Hubley, who served for four years with enthusiasm, commitment to our community, energy, integrity and wisdom. Gerry Weiss was re-elected to a second three-year term and was chosen by the Board as the new Chair of the Select Board. Alisa Brewer was elected Clerk. It was agreed to continue the Board's recent practice to rotate the office of vice-chair every month.

Meanwhile, the SB conducted its usual day-to-day business, appointing dozens of residents to boards and committees; holding many public hearings on a variety of issues; working closely with the many boards and committees to see that their ideas and concerns were taken seriously, often implemented. Among these were outreach bus improvements, signage to increase public safety on Town roads, improved parking downtown; the revitalization of the Town Commercial Relations Committee; approving many liquor and victualler licenses; holding public information sessions on the FY 08

budget process, which proved to be one of the most difficult in many years, culminating in working with the Town Manager, Finance Committee and Town Meeting to pass a balanced budget without the benefit of a Proposition 2 1/2 override, which was defeated by the voters.

The Select Board placed on the November ballot a small increase (from 1% to 1.5%) in the CPA surcharge for open space (farmland, forest, conservation and recreation) protection, community housing and historical preservation projects. This was overwhelmingly passed by the voters.

The Select Board also continued the task of addressing the problems created by the effect of Special Municipal Employee (SME) status on the workings of some boards and committees. We created a process by which every board and committee could learn the SME law and decide if they needed this status to operate effectively. In the past, all boards and committees were granted this status without question. Since instituting this procedure, fewer than 10 committees have applied for the status.

In an effort to be educated about the zoning articles that would be coming to the Annual Town Meeting and the Fall Special Town Meeting, members of the Select Board began attending hearings of the Zoning Subcommittee of the Planning Board.

We worked with the Cable Advisory Board and ACTV to finalize a new contract and to support the Chair of ACTV in testifying before the Massachusetts Cable Division to oppose the proposed 90 day licensing process.

We supported the MMA through letters as they sought to push the legislature on a number of proposals designed to bring more state aid to towns and cities.

We worked with the Disability Access Advisory Committee to finalize and approve the Americans with Disabilities Act's Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan and further voted our commitment to the implementation of the Transition Plan.

We helped deal with the difficulties experienced by the Amherst Survival Center as they struggled to improve their service to the community and respond to consumers' grievances.

We helped guide the lengthy and complex, but ultimately successful process for protecting the house at 575 North East Street from demolition and for securing a historical preservation.

We deliberated on tax classification before voting for equal tax rate for all classes of properties, no residential exemption and no small commercial exemption. The deliberation with the community was to explore each of these issues in depth before voting to make no changes in the current tax classification system. We also placed upon the ATM warrant an article, which was subsequently passed, to increase the annual adjusted gross income guidelines for tax work-off.

We undertook research to find ways for Town employees to more easily obtain home mortgages and placed the results on the Town website.

We helped push along the eventual dedication of the Connector between the UMass and Norwottuk Rail Trail in honor of Art Swift, a long-time advocate for increased bicycle paths and lanes in town.

Working with a local resident and area garden centers, we obtained over a dozen very large flower pots, which have helped beautify our downtown all summer.

It has been a privilege and pleasure working for our community.

Gerry Weiss, Chair
Alisa Brewer, Clerk
Anne Awad
Hwei-Ling Greeney
Rob Kusner

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